

THURSDAY, AUGUST 15, 1901.

## MIALL AND FOWLER'S "SELBORNE."

*The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne.* By Gilbert White. Edited, with an Introduction and Notes, by L. C. Miall, F.R.S., and W. Warde Fowler, M.A. Pp. xi + 386. (London : Methuen, 1901.) Price 6s.

**E**CCE ITERUM ! It is little over six months since the "painful" Mr. Sherborn compiled a bibliography of Gilbert White's matchless work, enumerating some 115 editions or issues of it, and here in England at least three more have since made their appearance, while we hear of another in America—to say nothing of the "Life and Letters" of the author now first fully given to light and recently reviewed in these columns (NATURE, July 18, 1901, p. 276) ! Still, the edition of the evergreen classic, "Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne," with introduction and notes by Prof. Miall and Mr. Warde Fowler, deserves consideration here, for though these gentlemen have judiciously availed themselves of the labours of some of their predecessors in the art editorial and commentarial, they have added a good many notes of their own, not a few possessing a quite original character, while their introduction is of itself well worth reading.

Messrs. Miall and Fowler were, of course, too early to profit by Mr. Holt-White's biography of his great-grand-uncle, for their publication followed his by only a few weeks, and they must regret that this is so, since they depended for the most part on the statements of the late Prof. Bell, and naturally fell into his mistakes. From some of the worst of them, it is true, they might have saved themselves had they studied, instead of being content to mention, the memoir of Gilbert White which appeared more than eighteen months ago in the "Dictionary of National Biography"; but they seem, like most persons, to have supposed that an article in a dictionary is only for reference and not for reading. It may be said that, except in one case, their errors are of comparatively slight importance; but they have perpetuated the modern Oxford slander—now proved to be founded on imperfect acquaintance with the facts—that White was unpopular in his college and only held his fellowship there by holding his tongue, the sole ground of this imputation being two or three private memorandums of the then Provost of Oriel, who was temporarily smarting from a contested election in which White had been his rival. The two men had previously been friends, and it is satisfactory to know that friends they became again when the acrimony engendered by the competition had passed off. The worst of this mud having been thrown is that some of it will stick; but it behoves every member of that distinguished college—nay, every Oxford man—to do his best to wipe away this unfounded asperion on White's fair fame. Mr. Fowler himself, we doubt not, must feel sorry that he has helped to spread this baseless accusation.

But our business here is not with White's book or life or character more than as they are dealt with by his present editors. With much of what Prof. Miall says we cordially agree, but when he writes that "White was a

man of few books and of no great range of thought" we wholly dissent. It may be that he could not read French—easily at least—few Oxford clerics of his day could; but he certainly did know what Buffon was about, and Hérisson also, for he criticises both; and if he did not name Leeuwenhoek (who wrote in English, by the way) or Malpighi, why, we may ask, should he do so? Undoubtedly John Hunter was then dissecting, but for the most part of his life he was known to few as being more than a skilful surgeon, and what was there in the six or eight papers he had then published to call for White's notice of them? Prof. Miall remarks that "all the books which were essential to the 'Natural History of Selborne' would have gone into a single shelf." That is a mistake: the book of Nature is not to be shelved, and therein lay White's chief study. Again, we are told that he cared little for the British Museum or the Botanic Garden at Kew, and that Cook's voyages are not dwelt upon repeatedly and with interest. With all deference to Prof. Miall, such objections are futile. The collections then at the British Museum must have been extremely unimportant—the Museum of the time was the Leverian, which is repeatedly mentioned by White, and Kew Garden was the King's private affair, to which the public scarcely had access; but in Cook's voyages White plainly took very great interest, partly, no doubt, through his acquaintance with Banks, Cook's shipmate on the first of them. Reference to them is often made in his correspondence, though there was no need to bring it into his book. Surely Prof. Miall would justly resent being accused of indifference to the *Challenger's* voyage because we see no mention of it in the volume before us? We may charge him, however, with not having divested himself of the commonplace desire to fall foul of Pennant, who, he says, "was not enough of a zoologist to write books on zoology." This is amazing, for who then, we may ask, wrote the "British Zoology" (of which there were three editions and four issues in his lifetime), the "Indian Zoology" (two editions and a German translation), the "Arctic Zoology" (the same), to say nothing of the "History of Quadrupeds" and other works? It may be urged that in these labours he had assistance, and that some classes of animals met with scant treatment; but when has such not been the case? and in what other country were contemporary zoologies of similar character published with the same wealth of illustration? Prof. Miall admits that he was the best-known English zoologist of his day, and if in the later issues of the "British Zoology" his acknowledgment of White's aid was general rather than particular, is not the fact directly due to the latter having corrected, as he himself says he did, the former's proofs, when he naturally did not insert passages in his own favour? Unless Pennant in his own "Life" is guilty of positive misstatement, which there is not the least reason to believe, he expended very considerable sums in the illustration of his several works, and when he paid for the plates he reasonably thought he had some right to use them. This, we take it, was the cause of the misunderstanding, for it seems to have been nothing more, between him and John White in regard to illustrations for the latter's "Fauna Calpensis," which, unfortunately, was never published. It was natural for Gilbert White at first to take his brother's side and

grumble at Pennant; but it would seem almost certain that explanations must have followed, and with them the discontent ceased. To us Pennant's influence on Gilbert White appears to have been distinctly advantageous, just as that of Barrington was the converse. No one can study Pennant's works without seeing that he was full of great ideas—whether they were original or not does not signify for our present purpose—and they were in the main true,<sup>1</sup> whereas Barrington's views seem to be always based on some prejudice or foregone conclusion, to support which he brought his very considerable forensic power to bear, and in the majority of cases arrived at an erroneous conclusion—take his ingenious argument as to the origin of the turkey, for example—and, though undoubtedly in many respects a benefactor, he was apparently White's evil genius in continually urging his absurd belief in the torpidity of the swallow-kind.

This remark brings us to Mr. Fowler's part of the introduction, in which he tries to account for White's astonishing adhesion to that belief, and his readiness to grasp at any scrap of information which seemed to support it, in spite of his own failure to discover a particle of evidence in its favour, and the fact that he fully accepted migration in the "short-winged birds" while doubting it in those that possessed far superior power of flight. Mr. Fowler's mode of accounting for White's "loyalty to an old delusion" seems hardly adequate, yet we must confess our inability to offer a suggestion that satisfies ourselves. We can hardly think that Aristotle, great as we admit was his authority in the Middle Ages, was responsible for the misconception, or even Olaus Magnus—much less Carew. They only repeated the stories of the vulgar and unreflective, and how Willughby's language on the subject "served to perpetuate the tradition" (as Mr. Fowler maintains it did) is more than we can understand. The whole thing is inexplicable, and is really the one flaw in White's reputation as a reasoning naturalist. Though in his earliest letter to Pennant (printed as No. x.) he frankly says that no account of swallows being found torpid in Hampshire is worth attention, the two instances he immediately cites—on the authority of "a clergyman of an inquisitive turn" and of "another intelligent person," each of them being in his boyhood—must have greatly influenced him. He can hardly be said to have been credulous on the subject. He simply thought that the evidence in favour of torpidity, though not satisfying, was such as ought to be tested, and he would no doubt have been pleased to obtain confirmation of it. In this respect he was like many people in our own day who engage in psychical research. Spirits refuse to come at their call from the vasty deep or boundless space, and search as he might, and did, amid the shrubs of Selborne Hanger or under the roofs of his neighbours' cottages, nor swift nor swallow would show itself.

Taken as a whole, the notes to this edition are very good, and those by Prof. Miall on the geology of the district are most acceptable, for few, if any, of White's recent editors have touched upon that subject. Those by Mr. Fowler on ornithology are for the most part extremely effective, whether culled from his predecessors

<sup>1</sup> The often-quoted case of the herring migration must, of course, be excepted, but therein he was misled by the reports of fishermen whom he trusted.

or added from his own experience, and though he does suggest (p. 35) that the bird "so desultory" in its flight, at which White shot in vain, was a siskin and not a chaffinch, and (p. 83) would seem to consider the motion of the redstart's tail open to doubt, we have no such impossible suppositions as are found elsewhere to the effect that White did not know a crow from a rook, or the song of the wryneck from the cry of the pied wood-pecker. If the introduction could be but freed from the blemishes we have here noticed, and a few more beside, this edition of the "Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne" might be recommended as one of the most accurate, as it is one of the neatest and most handy.

#### THE ORIGIN OF EUROPEAN PEOPLES.

*The Mediterranean Race: a Study of the Origin of European Peoples.* By G. Sergi. Pp 320; 93 illustrations in the text. The Contemporary Science Series. (London: Walter Scott, 1901.) Price 6s.

THE problem of our origins must always prove an interesting subject for research; speculation has found it only too fertile a prey. At the present state of our knowledge fresh information is being amassed continually, so that the field for speculation is, fortunately, becoming more narrowed. A recent contribution to the problem is from the enthusiastic Italian anthropologist, Prof. G. Sergi, of Rome, who has published in English an entirely new book, based on his "Origine e diffusione della stirpe Mediterranea," 1895. Those who are acquainted with the previous writings of Prof. Sergi will quite know what to expect in this new volume. The familiar arguments and data are reinforced by additional facts, and the author's conclusions are clearly and definitely stated. The following is the position he has adopted in this book, and which we may take as the expression of his matured views.

*Homo Neanderthalensis* is a distinct European species, which includes the Spy type and which originated in Europe in early Quaternary or possibly late Tertiary times. Hitherto it has not been found south of the Alps, and it has not completely disappeared from Europe, but persists in the Baltic, in Friesland and elsewhere.

The Chancelade, Laugerie-Basse, Baumes-Chaudes, Cro-Magnon crania constitute a group that extended from the Upper Quaternary into early Neolithic times. The view of Hervé and other French anthropologists is that this was a hyperborean stock that migrated from north to south as far as Africa, but excluding Egypt and the Canary Islands. Sergi shows that all the characteristics of the Chancelade skull are found in typical Mediterranean crania; indeed, he defines it as

"a *Pelasicus stegooides* of the *Ellipsooides* class, still found to-day in East Africa. Why refer to the Eskimo, a skull to be found so near as the Mediterranean?" (p. 195).

The other cranial types are admittedly quite Mediterranean in character. If Scandinavia was not inhabited before the Neolithic period and northern Europe could not be inhabited by man until after the Glacial epoch, it is not easy to see how the centre and south of Europe could be invaded by a race originating in the north in the Quaternary epoch (p. 199).